

CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

FACTSHEET

What is Cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis (or “Crypto” for short) is a disease that causes watery diarrhea. Crypto is caused by a microscopic parasite called *Cryptosporidium*. Crypto can be found in water, food, soil or on surfaces or dirty hands that have been contaminated with the feces (poop) of humans or animals infected with the parasite

Who can get Crypto?

Anyone can get sick with Crypto, but small children, adults who care for small children, people exposed to human feces (poop) through sexual contact, and people exposed to unfiltered, untreated water via swimming or drinking are at increased risk.

What are the symptoms of Crypto?

Symptoms include watery diarrhea, stomach cramps or pain, dehydration, nausea, vomiting, fever, and weight loss. Symptoms usually last about 1 to 2 weeks (with a range of a few days to 4 or more weeks) in people with healthy immune systems.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of Crypto generally begin 2 to 10 days (average 7 days) after becoming infected with the parasite.

How does Crypto spread?

Shedding of Crypto in poop begins when symptoms like diarrhea begin and can last for weeks after symptoms stop. Crypto can be spread by:

- Swallowing or intentionally drinking untreated water (for example, the water in swimming pools, fountains, lakes, rivers) contaminated with Crypto.
- Swallowing water, ice, or beverages contaminated with poop from infected humans or animals

- Eating undercooked food or drinking unpasteurized/raw apple cider or milk that gets contaminated with Crypto
- Touching your mouth with contaminated hands

How is Crypto treated?

Most people with healthy immune systems will recover from Crypto without treatment, but people with weakened immune systems are more likely to have severe and potentially life-threatening symptoms. Diarrhea can be managed by drinking plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Young children and pregnant women may be more susceptible to dehydration and rapid loss of fluids from diarrhea may be especially life threatening to babies. Anti-diarrheal medicine may help slow down diarrhea, but a healthcare provider should be consulted before such medicine is taken.

How can people protect themselves against Crypto?

- Practice good hand hygiene including washing your hands often with soap and water (Alcohol-based sanitizers are not effective against Crypto)
- Avoid food and water (drinking and recreational) that might be contaminated
- Minimize fecal (poop) exposure during sexual activity and wash thoroughly afterward.
- Exclude children with active diarrhea from childcare settings and from swimming until diarrhea has stopped.
- Regularly clean and sanitize toys and surfaces in childcare settings.

Where can I get more information?

Information about Cryptosporidiosis and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of District residents. For additional information, please visit <https://dchealth.dc.gov> or call (202) 442-9021.